

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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O 191920Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4668
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
JCS WASHDC
DA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 05636

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MORG, PINT, SP
SUBJECT: SPANISH ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF RESIGNS

REF: (A) DAO MADRID 05484 (DTG 171732Z MAY 78)
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1. SUMMARY: THE RESIGNATION EARLIER THIS WEEK OF LT. GENERAL JOSE VEGA RODRIGUEZ AS CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY, THE SECOND MOST INFLUENTIAL MILITARY POSITION IN SPAIN AT THIS TIME, WILL NOT SIT WELL WITH A NUMBER OF TOP MILITARY OFFICERS, BUT THE GOVERNMENT IS MOVING QUICKLY TO REPLACE HIM AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESIST STRONGLY ANY CONCESSIONS. THE REASONS FOR HIS RESIGNATION WERE APPARENTLY PRIMARILY PERSONAL (LOSS OF INFLUENCE OVER MAJOR DECISIONS) AND PROFESSIONAL (DISAGREEMENT WITH CERTAIN REFORMS AND APPOINTMENTS), RATHER THAN POLITICAL, ALTHOUGH HE IS SAID NOT TO HAVE LIKED THE UCD LEADERSHIP. HIS REPLACEMENT, WHO WILL BE NAMED AS EARLY AS TODAY, IS MOST LIKELY TO BE
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LT. GENERAL TOMAS LINIERS, PRESIDENT OF THE COURT OF MILITARY JUSTICE, WHO ENJOYS THE CONFIDENCE OF THE KING, PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT SUAREZ, AND FIRST VICE PRESIDENT AND DEFENSE MINISTER GUTIERREZ MELLADO. LINIERS LOST OUT TO VEGA IN THE RUNNING FOR THE JOB A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, IN PART BECAUSE VEGA HAD MUCH STRONGER SUPPORT FROM HIS FELLOW SENIOR OFFICERS. END SUMMARY.

2. VEGA'S RESIGNATION CAME WITHOUT FOREWARNING. IT WAS REPORTEDLY PRESENTED ON MAY 16 TO GUTIERREZ MELLADO DURING THE COURSE OF A LENGTHY MEETING AND ACCEPTED THE FOLLOWING DAY. ONLY THE WEEK BEFORE, VEGA HAD RELUCTANTLY POSTPONED (NOT CANCELLED) A LONG-PLANNED OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES SCHEDULED TO BEGIN ON MAY 15. WE WERE TOLD THIS WAS BECAUSE IT CONFLICTED WITH THE PLANS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO HAVE GUTIERREZ MELLADO VISIT WASHINGTON IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE WERE ASSURED TODAY BY A GOOD SOURCE IN GUTIERREZ MELLADO'S OFFICE THAT THIS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH VEGA'S RESIGNATION. HOWEVER, ENRIQUE MUGICA, CHAIRMAN OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEE OF THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES, TELLS US HE HAS IT FROM BOTH VEGA AND GUTIERREZ MELLADO THAT THIS CANCELLATION WAS IN FACT THE LAST STRAW WHICH PRECIPITATED THE RESIGNATION.

3. VEGA IS THE SECOND CHIEF OF STAFF APPOINTED BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT TO RESIGN IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REASONS RELATED TO REFORM OF THE ARMED FORCES. (NAVY CHIEF OF STAFF BUHIGAS RESIGNED IN NOVEMBER 1977 OVER BUDGETARY QUESTIONS, BY PUREST COINCIDENCE ALSO ON THE EVE OF AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE U.S.) IN VEGA'S CASE THERE EXISTED AN ACCUMULATION OF GRIEVANCES DATING BACK TO EARLY IN HIS TOUR OF DUTY, WHICH BEGAN IN JANUARY 1977. HIS SUPPORT IN THE SPRING OF 1977 FOR THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HANDLED LEGALIZATION
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OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS IN SOME DOUBT, ALTHOUGH HE HAS CONSISTENTLY SAID THE RIGHT THINGS IN PUBLIC ON POLITICAL MATTERS. VEGA TOLD MUGICA HE FIRST SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION IN JULY 1977, THEN AS NOW OVER PROFESSIONAL MATTERS AND TO SOME EXTENT ALSO PERHAPS BECAUSE OF A PERSONALITY CONFLICT WITH GUTIERREZ MELLADO. HE HAS SHARED GUTIERREZ MELLADO'S SUPPORT FOR REFORM OF SPANISH POLITICAL LIFE. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT MATCH GUTIERREZ MELLADO'S ENTHUSIASM FOR THIS GOVERNMENT. VEGA AND GUTIERREZ MELLADO BOTH TOLD MUGICA THAT THE MATTER OF PUBLIC ORDER IN THE BASQUE PROVINCES WAS NOT AT ISSUE, AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED IN THE PRESS.

4. THE LIST OF PROFESSIONAL COMPLAINTS IMPUTED TO VEGA BY ONE OR ANOTHER SOURCE INCLUDES:

-- UNSPECIFIED DISAGREEMENTS OVER DEFENSE POLICY;

-- SEVERAL RECENT SENIOR ARMY APPOINTMENTS WITH WHICH HE DISAGREED;

-- DISAGREEMENT WITH EFFORTS TO REFORM THE ARMY RETIREMENT

SYSTEM;

-- CONCERNS OVER THE REWRITING, NOW ALMOST FINISHED, OF
THE CODE OF MILITARY CONDUCT; AND

-- RESENTMENT OF THE ROLE RECENTLY ASSIGNED THE MINISTER
OF DEFENSE AS WATCHDOG OVER THE SPANISH JOINT CHIEFS OF
STAFF, WHICH INJECTED HIM MORE DIRECTLY INTO THE MILITARY
CHAIN OF COMMAND AS WELL AS THE POLITICAL/ADMINISTRATIVE
CHAIN.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4669

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JCS WASHDC

DA WASHDC 0002

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USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 MADRID 05636

WE ARE INCLINED TO ACCEPT WHAT MUGICA CLAIMS BOTH VEGA AND
GUTIERREZ MELLADO TOLD HIM, I.E., THAT NO SINGLE ISSUE OF
SUBSTANCE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPLIT. AT THE HEART OF
THE MATTER ARE THE CONCERN OF A PROUD, AMBITIOUS, AND
OUTSPOKEN MAN AT BEING INCREASINGLY OVERSHADOWED BY THE
DEFENSE MINISTER AND THE NEW DEFENSE MINISTRY, WHICH IS
GRADUALLY SPREADING ITS WINGS, PLUS THE CONSTANT DIFFICULTY
IN HARMONIZING SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S MILITARY REFORM
PROGRAM WITH LOYALTY TO ARMY TRADITIONS AND HIS FELLOW
SENIOR OFFICERS. HE APPARENTLY RESISTED PARTICULARLY
STRONGLY GUTIERREZ MELLADO'S EFFORTS TO SPEED THE RETIRE-
MENT OF SENIOR OFFICERS.

5. VEGA HAS ENJOYED A FINE REPUTATION AS A SOLDIER AND HAS
FAR MORE FRIENDS IN THE OFFICER CORPS THAN DOES GUTIERREZ

MELLADO. STILL, HE HAS BY NO MEANS, EITHER, BEEN A
DARLING OF THE ULTRA-RIGHT. (THE FIRST REPORT OF HIS
RESIGNATION IN THE EXTREMIST DAILY "ALCAZAR" WAS NOTABLY
DRY IN TONE.)
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6. THE REACTION OF THE SPANISH ARMED FORCES TO VEGA'S
RESIGNATION CANNOT YET BE FULLY ASSESSED. THERE IS A
STORY GOING ABOUT THAT A NUMBER OF THE CAPTAINS GENERAL
(PRESUMABLY THE SEVERAL ACTIVE ULTRA-CONSERVATIVES AMONG
THEM) ARE PRESSING THE KING FOR GUTIERREZ MELLADO'S HEAD.
GUTIERREZ MELLADO HAS NEVER BEEN VERY POPULAR AMONG MOST
SENIOR OFFICERS, AND VEGA'S RESIGNATION DOUBTLESS DOES NOT
SIT WELL WITH A NUMBER OF THEM. BUT THE KING HAS RESISTED
SUGGESTIONS THAT GUTIERREZ MELLADO GO BEFORE AND CAN
SCARCELY DO OTHERWISE THIS TIME. GUTIERREZ MELLADO HAD
APPEARED TO HAVE REGAINED THE INITIATIVE IN RUNNING THE
MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IN RECENT MONTHS. IT IS NOT BEYOND
ALL POSSIBILITY THAT HE AND SUAREZ HELPED PRECIPITATE
VEGA'S RESIGNATION INTENTIONALLY BY CANCELLING VEGA'S
VISIT TO THE U.S. EATON

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